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AUTHOR Seymour, John C.
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ABSTRACT

Within the context of a discussion of approaches to student development and retention, this paper describes a program of student development involving a person - a preceptor - who takes responsibility for a student's growth and well-being. Introductory material outlines the traditional approach to student development and discusses ways in which student development could function more effectively. Next, a review of the literature is presented in the areas of counseling and career development, faculty advising, and attrition/retention, and key characteristics of successful programs are highlighted. Then, major features of the Career and Academic Planning System (CAPS)/preceptor program are presented, emphasizing the program's objective to break down traditional barriers between counselors, advisors, instructors, and student personnel specialists. Next, the report describes the development of the CAPS program at Jefferson State Junior College from the early 1970's and the growing role of the preceptor in monitoring and evaluating the work of each student. Finally, the process of implementation is addressed, with respect to programmatic considerations; the logistical arrangements developed to assign preceptors to students; and the costs of program development. (HB)

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CAPS-PRECEPTORS: SERVING ALL THE STUDENTS

A Paper Presented at the National Convention of the

American Association of Community and Junior Colleges

San Diego, California - April 14, 1985

JOHN C. SEYMOUR
Professor of Administration and
Higher Education
The University of Alabama
University, AL 35486

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Also Presenting:

JUDY M. MERRITT
President
Jefferson State Junior College
Birmingham, Alabama

J. VERNON BLACKBURN
Professor of Behavioral Studies
The University of Alabama
University, Alabama

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Students entering college are confronted with a series of challenges which require more than just a little exploration time before final decisions can be made. Some of these challenges are peer relationships, academics, self reliance, career aspirations, and personal values. Inspection of this list readily reveals that none is a matter that can be resolved in a short period of time. Each, furthermore, has a relationship to all others and tends to evolve into some resolution as progress is made on one or more of the other challenges faced. For this reason, then, the approach to the freshman year experience is seen as being a systems approach out of necessity. By systems approach we mean an arrangement of services to students that form a unified whole. Career development, counseling, academic planning, orientation to this new and wondrous environment, help with developing effective study skills and experiencing success in the academic world, and resources to aid in balancing home, peer, job, and money pressures at this critical time in the student's life.

But simply systematizing the approach to the student is not enough. Perusal of the literature on student development tells of countless varied approaches being made in higher education on this topic. What is lacking? What additive could cause the system to function with effectiveness? An examination of recent

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trends in research in three critical areas - counseling and career development, faculty advising, and retention - offers some quite interesting insights.

BACKGROUND FROM RESEARCH

Please review with us today the path of theoreticians and researchers in the field as we examine what seem to be important gleanings from these three principal subject areas: career development and counseling, faculty advising, and attrition-retention.

1. Counseling and Career Development

Super's (1957) view of vocational development as a major aspect of the individual's total development has been considered by educators for nearly 30 years. The subject of careers and college students frequently invokes images of a life's work made possible by education at the postsecondary level. The literature is replete with declaration after declaration that: (1) career development is an integral part of the totality of human development; and (2) that academic planning is or should be related to career goals.

Pickering and Vacc (1984) reviewed the research of career development interventions for college students and the effectiveness of such programs. The finding of particular interest is that the longer-term interventions (six or more structured as opposed to self-help or fewer sessions) proved more successful. The actual figures were 93% of the investigations of long-term intervention (usually career courses or similar types) revealed improvement as opposed to 79% of the shorter-term/self-help types

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of intervention (p. 154). For institutions of higher learning the endeavor to forge links between the vocational and other aspects of student development has become more and more important. Munske (1983) suggested departmental career planning courses as an approach to relating careers more directly to academic interests while at the same time utilizing faculty advisors more effectively.

Thurston and Robbins (1983) have compiled an excellent review of counseling directions for two-year colleges in this decade. Some highlights of that research serve to give focus to this topic. Pointing out that because of the retrenchment so common in American higher education, they declare that many counselors in the two-year institution (and this true in most four-year ones as well) have moved more and more to group activities in an effort to expand their professional "reach" as student numbers gradually continued to climb. They raise a provocative question as to the wisdom of cutting down on individual contact with students in this manner.

Don G. Creamer, in another chapter in this same volume, defines the modern role of the community college counselor. This role includes heavy responsibilities in teaching, consulting, administering, program evaluation, curriculum, remediation, staff training, learning and development, program design, and research to name only a few dimensions outside the normal counseling or student service specialist expectations. He concludes his treatise with the view that counselors must refine their skills to include teaching and administrative responsibilities, must learn to develop referral networks and improved methods of

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interinstitutional articulation, and professionally accept the idea of needing to learn new competencies.

One other citation from Thurston and Robbins interesting report is that of Robert B. Young who discusses the organizational patterns of the future in student development areas. Essentially, the need for a restructuring of the basic divisions of an institution is seen. His model, a human resource development model, would bring together student personnel workers, traditional staff personnel, and faculty into a coordinated, sharply focused unit or system.

One may conclude that there is no quick solution to the problem of effectiveness in counseling and career development programming. A successful program will take time, will be almost inseparable from academic planning, and will be almost totally integrated into the entire complex of other student services.

2. Faculty Advising

Mclaughlin and Starr (1982) reviewed the literature from 1965 on faculty advising and concluded that the research was largely critical of the traditional approaches to advising. They also identified two principles that endured over time: faculty are the essential heart of effective advising programs, and good advising contributes to student success and satisfaction in college.

Creamer and Atwell (1984) examine the issue of who does the advising and conclude that who advises is not as important as program effectiveness. Beal (1980) reported that faculty advising

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as a contractual obligation of the faculty was important enough to warrant this function's use as a basis for hiring faculty, for use in the evaluation of those faculty subsequently, and as a focus of special in-service training.

Habley's (1983) examination of seven organizational models used in student advisement revealed a number of possible models from which to choose in establishing an advising system. These ranged from an assigned faculty member to a student model to a self-contained advising center model staffed by professional advisors who did all advising. Between these extremes were models where faculty shared to varying degrees the advising responsibilities. He concluded his study by citing some 10 factors that should govern model selection. Student needs, staffing (availability, willingness, perogatives, etc.), information flow (availability of accurate and timely information), advisor selection, advisor training, accountability (to institution and to student), coordination-direction-control, communication, evaluation/reward, and economy were seen as major factors.

Trombley (1984) identifies two broad divisions in the advising function as she analyzed the complexity of tasks in academic advising. One group of tasks, she writes, can be categorized under the role of information specialist. The other group may be listed under the role of counselor. Although the categories overlap somewhat, Trombley suggests that the information role--with the less complex group of tasks--is the role assumed by most faculty in existing advising programs. She believes that assigning these less complex tasks to paraprofessionals would leave faculty and counselors more time

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for the more complex tasks involved in the other role - counseling - which makes up this total process.

Literature is also available which explores the integration of a number of currently discrete institutional functions into an interrelated system (Thompson & Miller, 1983), computer assisted advising approaches (Spencer, Peterson, & Kramer, 1983), team approaches to advising (Grahn, Kahn & Kroll, 1983), and many other variations on similar themes. One of the most thought-provoking contributions from the literature, however, is the essay by Holmes, Clark, and Irvine (1983) who observe that (a) faculty knowledge of disciplines provides a better base for advising, and (b) institutions can't afford specialists for this job. They go on to describe the differences between institutionalized advising and professional advising, declaring that the former requires minimum professional attention while the latter demands considerable personal commitment and time. Pointing to the fact that the institution's contribution (staff time, technologies, facilities) is essential, the authors state, "Academic faculty may prove much more willing to advise well when they feel that clerical and procedural problems have been solved elsewhere by computer or peer advisors" (p. 23). Both structure and systematization of support are seen as necessary characteristics of successful programs.

Faculty advising, then, is seen as an area in which changes have been slow in coming though experimentation is not uncommon. The possibility exists that the reluctance to change which has

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been so characteristic of American higher education is responsible for the perennial nature of the problem. Since 1969, Seymour and Blackburn have contended that an extensive reconstruction of the roles of faculty advisor and student personnel specialist was needed. Research in the intervening years supports this notion.

3. Attrition-Retention

The third area we want to look at briefly is the more current research on retention. This is a complex subject on which there is no definitive study. Motivation, prior experience, economics, peer influences, success or the lack of it, family situations, and personal finances are but a few of the many, many variables at play here. However, educators and researchers seem to be identifying some potentially useful considerations that may help institutions improve their batting averages. Herron (1970), for instance, make two major observations after a careful review of the literature on attrition: First, the freshman year is the most critical period in a student's life for withdrawing from school; and second, those withdrawing differ significantly in both their motivation and their personality characteristics from the students who persist. The critical nature of that first year had caused other researchers such as Blanc, Debuhr, and Martin (1983), to examine ways of intervening in that freshman experience to improve the chances of the potential school-leavers. These three researchers investigated the effects of supplemental instruction in high risk courses (i.e., those in which a large number of Ds and Fs were given and in which a greater than usual number of withdrawals occurred). Their data

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show that students who participated in the SI program which offered supplemental instruction by knowledgeable peers, graduate student, or upperclassmen on an organized, regular basis achieved significantly higher GPAs and semester course grades than non-SI students. They had significantly fewer D's and F's and withdrawals than non-SI students, and they also reenrolled at a higher rate than non-SI students.

Programs similar to the SI effort are in the right direction, according to Gardiner and Nazari-Robati (1983) who feel that institutions must concentrate on why students stay in college rather than why they leave. This theme is reflected in the research of Lewis, Leach, and Lutz (1983) who focus on marketing approaches which are built on requirements for meeting those needs of students which keep them in school. Examples are cited in their study such as developing a survival orientation program for specific student groups (i.e., low achievers, the academically deficient, etc.), implementing a systematic interactive communication process using word processor, computer and telephone, and programmed study times in syllabi for "tough" courses.

McCabe and Skidmore (1983) summarized an effort at Miami-Dade Community College that had extended over several years. The major thrusts were retention and improved effectiveness in the institution's programs. These excellent accounts play a striking theme: students need structure, and they need it in that first year of college as early as possible.

What we have presented here is not an exhaustive review of

all the literature dealing with counseling and career development, faculty advising, or retention. Rather, the results of our study have shown an interesting singularity: programs seem to enjoy greater success if certain characteristics are contained within them. These are (1) they are structured as opposed to being crisis centered or problem-focused for an individual student; (2) they extend over a period of time as contrasted to single or spasmodic or intermittant moments of intervention; (3) institutional personnel are given specific in-service training or help in carrying out the assignments in the program; and (4) all students participate, not just those who are determined by some criterion as potential beneficiaries or just those who may happen to volunteer. These characteristics, then, are underlying foundations to the program we are now about to describe and for which we have great hopes.

THE PRECEPTOR CONCEPT

One characteristic seen as essential was a human additive that could serve as a catalyst to the entire effort the institution makes to facilitate student progress. Student personnel specialists, counselors, advisors, instructors, peer counselors, and a host of other labels have been used to identify persons who are charged with the responsibility of working with students in the academic setting. Each designation, however, carries with it a connotation of specific territoriality which must not be violated. A basic assumption of the CAPS/Preceptor program is the notion that the human additive must be concerned with the student and not with a job description.

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The Preceptor, as the human additive, is a counselor, an advisor, a teacher, a friend, a resource, and an evaluator. People who fill the role of preceptor may come from a wide variety of backgrounds, but they share one common characteristic: they want to help students grow. The role is new. The role is different. Adjusting to it will take time. Learning the mix of new and often strange responsibilities will require dedication on the part of those who fill the role. The institution will face a major challenge in providing the internal leadership to overcome the normal resistance to change and to set up the kind of rewards system that compensates for the hard work and dedication that will be required.

CAPS AND PRECEPTORS; A FORTUITIOUS MARRIAGE

The Career and Academic Planning System (CAPS) evolved over a period of years from a concept first presented to the American Personnel and Guidance Association (now AACD) in 1971 by Seymour and Blackburn. Student needs require an integrated approach to both personal development and academic development with perhaps a specialist giving full attention to the process, that early paper stated. Continued exploration of the idea led the authors to expand their idea: essential ingredients of an acceptable program included effective identification of the environment in which the student found himself or herself; review of vital study or academic skills and improvement in specific skill areas where needed; a fairly thorough understanding of what a college catalog was all about; guided exploration of one's self culminating in an inventory of recognized abilities, aptitudes, interests, values,

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and limitations; a usable introduction to the world of work with structured exploration of one or more viable options; and an academic plan which would facilitate the student's realization of his or her goals.

Specific applications of the CAPS system grew out of Jefferson State Junior College Academic Services staff considerations of a 1982 student needs survey which had been suggested by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accrediting team a year or two earlier. CAPS was considered to be a comprehensive, positive thrust toward addressing critical student needs.

A problem which was recognized from the beginning centered around the right of every student to receive the full benefit of staff services. Over the country many examples could be seen of institutions offering services to selected groups of students in elective seminars, tutorials in which one had to be referred, or services to "walk-ins" alone. Also to be found were a few services for all the students, essentially orientation which may be largely a waste of time when done en masse.

Careful consideration of a didactic course delivery for the system identified a number of problems. First, the scheduling of so many sections in a large institution impinged upon the academic facilities with real danger to the ongoing programs of the college. Second, students would effectively kill a time slot for a regular credit course with this approach which would carry less or even no academic credit. A third limitation was inherent in the group approach as opposed to the individual relationship felt to be the most desirable arrangement. In addition, students were seen as having needs that would vary from one to another in

the amount of time required to explore and resolve those needs. A class or group approach would not be amenable to such individually paced development. The final decision, then, was to offer the structured CAPS experience on an independent study basis. This arrangement seemed to meet all the objections which had been identified.

Still, the question of who would give oversight to the work of each student remained. Exploring this topic, the Academic Services staff at Jeff State and a team of consultants listed the essential characteristics of the professional who would fill this role: A person who was a true "teacher" and who had a real interest in students; a person who had skills in building positive human relationships; a person who could admit they did not have "all the answers" to students' problems; a person who had a thorough knowledge of the institution; and a person who could enter into a professional relationship that required evaluation of the student in the end. None of the existing personnel descriptions seemed to fit this role, and none was the exactly correct title for the kind of person called for here. Thus, the role of "Preceptor" was born.

IMPLEMENTATION

(1) Programmatic Considerations: Specific goals of the CAPS program at Jefferson State included providing each student with approaches to effective studying, to understand academic planning and matriculation procedures, to have guided experiences in exploring careers of interest, and to know to whom they could turn when in need of help with any of these goals. All of these grew

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out of the student needs survey the SACS team had suggested.

A number of vehicles for accomplishing these goals were examined: longer first of term orientation period, a structured didactic course, required counseling sessions in the summer, and a series of specialized courses designed to facilitate specific goal attainment. However, the independent study vehicle was finally selected as the most feasible. A credit experience, GS100 was developed to respond to all of the goals envisioned. A series of workshops and retreats enabled the student services staff to formulate priorities and sequences for the course. This input from those staff members was invaluable to consultants who tailored an independent study guide to meet the requirements for the course.

Two major institutional groups should also be credited with a significant contribution to the implementation of this program. Jeff State's Administrative Council, composed of deans and divisions heads, and the college's Curriculum Committee, composed of faculty representatives from all instructional areas, carefully reviewed the GS100 plans, made critical suggestions, and expressed indispensable support through their unanimous recommendations for the adoption of the program.

At this point, Dr. Judy Merritt should be recognized for the leadership she has given to her institution in its move to serve ALL Jeff State students. Futuristic in perspective, she knew that the traditional approaches were not as effective as she wanted them to be and that something different could be worth the effort. Tirelessly, she worked to build enthusiasm for seeking a

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solution to the problem of more adequate service to students among her faculty and staff. Only she knows the countless hours spent in individual conferences, committee meetings, and small group discussions on this subject. Dr. Blackburn and I are most honored to be on this program with her today.

The final blueprint for the CAPS-based GS100 program took the shape of an independent study experience closely tied to planned consultations with Preceptors and based upon the study guide, How to Succeed in College by REALLY Trying. All full time new students (those taking 10 quarter hours or more) were required to enroll. An initial small group meeting with an assigned preceptor was designed to get the student off and running and particularly to let the student meet his/her preceptor. The CAPS manual contains nine units through which each student works during the quarter. The units address areas of major goal concerns. Students were told they could make appointments to see their preceptors as often as they needed, but each student was required to schedule two appointments for preceptor review of work done in the course. Grades are assigned by the preceptor.

Some of the highlights of the course include the MAP (My Action Plan) each student completes which is a detailed curriculum plan to reach his or her academic goal. Each course needed is listed as well as the quarter in which it should be taken. Prerequisites are noted. Another is the self analysis of aptitudes, abilities, and interests into which the manual guides the student. Specific exploration of potential careers is still another feature of the CAPS/GS100 experience. Site visits,

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career lab research, and exploring job values are included.

Three types of supplemental learning aids were used. These were video modules, an example of which you saw in the opening of this session. The types included Learning Modules, Academic Modules, and Complementary Modules. Those of the first type were closely keyed to the CAPS manual's nine units and offered specific information related to the assignments. Academic Modules featured the various academic fields of the college, major areas of study in each, and career applications of those fields of study. The latter type consisted of specific tapes dedicated to questions or concerns students often expressed. Some examples include tapes on what to expect when you transfer to a senior institution (featuring a prominent dean at a nearby state university), how to get involved in student activities, specific study skills, peer relations, dating-courtship-marriage, and substance abuse. All of the latter type programs are selected on a voluntary basis by students.

(2) Logistics. The registration process saw every student who registered for GS100 assigned to a preceptor. A balance was maintained during that process to minimize overloading any preceptor. Preceptors, who came principally from academic services, included faculty, support staff, and administrators. An attempt was made to regulate the numbers of assigned students to those who had other major responsibilities, but a full time preceptor could expect to have up to 150 students assigned. Most of these persons had been full time counselors in the past. Each of the preceptors was urged to make referrals to community agencies

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that offered specialized services (such as the regional mental health centers or state employment services) and to utilize their time in ways that more directly impacted upon the educational and career goals of the students. A basic expectation was that many, many more educationally appropriate sessions would be held with a greater number of students.

Plans are underway to set up an institutional screening and selection committee for appointing preceptors. Many faculty are already serving, but a larger number is expected to join preceptor ranks. There are still support staff who have the professional background to be preceptors who may be considered. In addition, a surprising number of administrators have expressed a desire for more student contact and want to serve.

(3) Costs. Since the program is at a preliminary stage of development, any assessment of costs would be guesswork. Most of the personnel costs are negligible at this point since a realignment of duties has been the major approach. The college administrative council will be considering the relationship of preceptor duties to other work load factors in the future, and a better project of actual costs can then be made.

HOW HAS THIS WORKED?

Dr. Vernon Blackburn will now tell you how the preliminary evaluation is shaping up. Dr. Blackburn.

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